

# WHAT DIAGNOSIS? WHICH REMEDY? CRITICAL REFLECTIONS ON THE *DIAGNOSTIC OVERVIEW* OF SOUTH AFRICA'S NATIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION<sup>1</sup>

Ernst M Conradie

University of the Western Cape

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## Abstract

*This contribution offers some critical reflections on the Diagnostic Overview produced by the South African National Planning Commission. The argument is structured in the form of catena and commentary with main sections devoted to the assumption of the need for economic growth, factors inhibiting economic growth, the category of unemployability, and the impact of inequalities. It is suggested that Christian discourse on sin, understood as a form of social diagnostics, can contribute to an in-depth diagnosis by uncovering the root causes of the problem from an ultimate perspective.*

**Key Words:** Diagnostic Report; Inequality; National Development Plan; National Planning Commission; Sin; Social Diagnostics; Unemployability

## Introduction

Former South African President Jacob Zuma appointed a National Planning Commission (NPC) in April 2010 with Minister Trevor Manuel as its chairperson. The NPC produced a five volume Diagnostic Report (on Human Conditions, Material Conditions, Nation-Building, the Economy and Institutions, and Governance), together with a helpful 'Diagnostic Overview' in 2011 followed by the release of the 'National Development Plan' (NDP) itself in 2012. The NDP was endorsed at the Mangaung assembly of the African National Congress in December 2012 and was also adopted as an election manifesto for the April 2014 national elections, despite resistance against it from the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu), an alliance partner of the ANC, and the National Union of Mineworkers in particular. Although the NDP is obviously a significant planning document, there is considerable public debate as to whether the government itself is fully committed to its implementation. It is typically affirmed by business and industry but contested by trade unions.

The findings of the *Diagnostic Overview* are captured under a number of brief statements:

- 1) Too few South Africans are employed;
- 2) The quality of education for poor black South Africans is substandard;
- 3) Poorly located and inadequate infrastructure limits social inclusion and faster economic growth;

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<sup>1</sup> This contribution is based on a paper prepared for the annual meeting of the Theological Society of South Africa, 17-19 June 2015.

- 4) South Africa's growth path is highly resource-intensive and hence unsustainable;
- 5) Spatial challenges continue to marginalise the poor;
- 6) The ailing public health system confronts a massive disease burden;
- 7) The performance of the public service is uneven;
- 8) Corruption undermines state legitimacy and service delivery;
- 9) South Africa remains a divided society. In my view this is an excellent but nevertheless deeply flawed document – which is most helpful simply because it provides a basis for public debate. Although this diagnosis will become outdated (e.g. with more recent debates on state capture), there is no doubt that these issues as identified cut deeply to the core of the underlying problem.

In this contribution I will engage with this diagnosis of the South African society while keeping in mind (but without foregrounding) the much maligned Christian discourse on sin. My assumption is that the very notion of sin is best understood as reflections on and abstractions from previous diagnostic exercises to capture the deepest malaise of society, for example in the Hebrew prophetic tradition. At its best such social analysis leads to a discernment of the “signs of the time”. In South Africa there is a rich tradition of such social analysis, diagnosis and prophetic critique – marked especially by the Study Project on Christianity in Apartheid Society (Spro-cas, 1969-1977), launched by the Christian Institute and the *Kairos Document* (1985) produced by the Institute for Contextual Theology.

I need to admit that this exercise is fraught with many dangers. Those who wish to discern the finger of God in history all too often read their own interests into such history. Christians engaged in social analysis have a double temptation, namely either merely to repeat what secular analysts (with considerable more expertise) have been saying, or to seek to make a distinct contribution in the moralising form of calling for family values, patriarchal authority, moral rearmament, moral regeneration or suggesting religious conversion as a remedy for all the ills of society. A secularised version of this argument would be to emphasise the role of faith communities in fostering social cohesion.<sup>2</sup> A middle path is to find sweet similarities between, for example, consumerist spending and the vice of greed, or racism and the vice of pride.

My sense is that the specific contribution that Christians can make to a common task of understanding what is wrong in society can come from two sides. Pastoral experience in local Christian communities and the work of faith-based organisations can enable leaders to keep their ears to the ground to gather particular insights in the dynamics of society. Inversely, the prophetic imagination can enable one to challenge the depth of analysis in order to capture the very root of a problem. Prophets are not always interested in details but can play a role to articulate a vision of the good society and to call what is wrong by name.

In the rest of this contribution I will engage with the *Diagnostic Overview* of the National Planning Commission on this basis. I will structure this in the form of catena and

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<sup>2</sup> The only time that the *Diagnostic Overview* mentions the role of religion is with reference to social cohesion. The functionalist understanding of religion is notable: “For many South Africans, faith is an important element of social capital, and religious institutions are also useful for the social cohesion project because they are a repository of social values.” If Sunday at 10:00 is indeed the “most divided hour” in South Africa, this may not be the most significant contribution that religion can make. Indeed, as the *Diagnostic Overview* adds, “Similarly, other social activities such as sport, recreation, education, work and community organisations are essential building blocks in uniting people by creating a common identity and understanding of their fellow citizens. They are important partners for driving nation-building and social cohesion” (p. 27).

commentary, i.e. quotations from the *Diagnostic Overview* and comments on the validity of such assessments. My aim is not to be comprehensive but to highlight selected areas of concern that are perhaps underdeveloped in the Diagnostic Overview.

### **On the un/contested Need for Economic Growth (with a View to the Future)**

“Economic performance has been mixed. The South African economy has grown by about 3.3 percent a year between 1995 and 2010, following almost two decades of stagnation... While racial inequality remains a stubborn reality for the vast majority, the proportion of black people in the top 20 percent of income earners has risen from about half to well over two-thirds between 1995 and 2009” (p. 7).

“Slow growth in per capita incomes is one explanation for poverty levels. ... The acceleration of economic growth is not yet sufficiently high or sustained to make a meaningful impact after many years of population growth and economic stagnation” (p. 8).

There is little doubt that the *Diagnostic Overview* is premised on the neo-liberal assumption that sustained economic growth is desirable in the South African context in order to address all the other concerns. This is already expressed in the foreword: “We acknowledge that our growth so far has been insufficiently inclusive. Too many people remain poor and marginalised” (p. 1). The solution is then to make growth more inclusive. Even though the emphasis on economic growth is qualified with a discussion on resource restraints, social concerns and a recognition of the significance of sustainability, the mantra of faster economic growth (measured in terms of Gross Domestic Product) is regarded as the bottom-line for prosperity in South Africa. It is economic growth that has to resolve the crisis in unemployment.<sup>3</sup> Such job creation and taxes derived from a growing economy will help to address the obvious need for social development amongst large sectors of the population. Sustained development may be measured by higher levels of education and better quality education for all. The fourfold key to the vision to “improve the quality of life” (p. 4) for all is therefore education, development, employment and above all else economic growth. The perceived remedy seems to influence the diagnosis.

There is no need here to unmask the fallacy that infinite economic growth is possible on a finite planet. Dematerialised growth<sup>4</sup> that is not reliant on fossil fuels for energy or vast mineral resources is indeed sustainable but where can such a model be found globally? The *Diagnostic Overview* does recognise that “South Africa’s growth path is highly resource-intensive and hence unsustainable” and that it continues to reflect and reproduce this dependence on natural resource exploitation (p. 17). South Africa, of course, may be regarded as a ‘developing’ economy where there is indeed a need to allow for such growth.<sup>5</sup> There is also no doubt that prosperity for all can be enhanced through improved technology, more

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<sup>3</sup> Julian May suggests that economic growth is a necessary condition to alleviate poverty but not a sufficient condition. What is also needed is human development in order to enhance the “human capabilities” (Amartya Sen) of people (alongside natural resources, social and institutional assets and human-made assets) to address their own needs. See Julian May (ed.), *Poverty and Inequality in South Africa: Meeting the Challenge*. Cape Town: David Philip, 2000:8.

<sup>4</sup> See Mark Swilling, “Growth, Resource Use and Decoupling: Towards a ‘Green new Deal’ for South Africa”, Harold Wolpe Lecture, March 2011.

<sup>5</sup> The *Diagnostic Overview* recognises that “South Africa is considered an upper middle income country by virtue of the average national income per person or GDP per capita. This status, however, masks extreme inequality in income and access to opportunity. Deep poverty is widespread, and constrains human development and economic progress” (p. 8). The question, then, is how to resolve poverty and inequality together. The answer seems to be premised on the need for economic growth.

efficiency, better management and less corruption – without using more non-renewable resources or consuming more fossil fuels. However, there is no recognition in the *Diagnostic Overview* that the global environmental (and carbon) footprint of current economic growth is not sustainable. Energy debates in South Africa focus on the efficient and effective supply of sources of energy for an increasing demand. There was widespread resentment over the mechanism of load shedding that had to be introduced to address the inability of the national electricity grid to supply sufficient energy to meet national demands. Such resentment is understandable given concerns over gross mismanagement and inefficiency in parastatal companies. Although there are debates on alternative sources of energy, the legitimacy of such an increasing demand seems to be taken for granted. Admittedly, the *Diagnostic Overview* recognises the challenges posed by an energy-intensive economy (without questioning the need for development). It states:

A critical future challenge for the NPC will thus be to balance the potential benefits from further development of our natural resource and mineral endowments with a less energy-intensive development path that is more environmentally sustainable and which offers more opportunities for currently marginalised sections of the population (p. 19).<sup>6</sup>

Again, a growth in the production (the generation of electricity) and consumption of energy is possible by means of sustainable alternatives to the use of fossil fuels. It is also possible to uncouple economic growth from increases in energy consumption.<sup>7</sup> However, global tendencies are in the opposite direction so that there is, instead, a sustained increase in the use of fossil fuels, despite global concerns over climate change.<sup>8</sup> Given the already very

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<sup>6</sup> The concept of sustainability is not explored at any length in *the Diagnostic Overview*. The word “sustain” (in various forms) appears 10 times in the document, twice to refer to the sustainable use of resources, six times to affirm the need to sustain an economic growth-path (!) and twice in a more general sense. It is indeed a slippery concept in need of clarification since very different questions are being addressed. See my recent contribution in this regard in Ernst M Conradie, “Is it not God’s Mercy That Nourishes and Sustains Us ... Forever? Some Theological Perspectives on Entangled Sustainabilities”, *Scriptura* 116, 2017:38-54.

<sup>7</sup> The *Wikipedia* entry on world energy consumption may suffice here: Global annual energy supply from fossil fuels increased from 83.374 terawatt hours in 1990 to 117.076 terawatt hours in 2008, an overall increase of 23.9%.

<sup>8</sup> This is expressed acutely in the “Earth Statement” issued by 17 leading scientists on 22 April 2015 with a view to the Conference of Parties meeting in Paris in December 2015. Three of the eight statements are worth quoting here in full (see <http://earthstatement.org/statement/>, accessed 22 April 2014):

2. *The remaining global carbon budget – the limit of what we can still emit in the future – must be well below 1 000 Gt CO<sub>2</sub> to have a reasonable chance to hold the 2°C line.* Humankind has already emitted around 2 000 Gt CO<sub>2</sub> since the beginning of industrialisation. Respecting the global carbon budget means leaving at least three quarters of all known fossil fuel reserves in the ground. With current emissions trends, the remaining 1 000 Gt CO<sub>2</sub> would be used up within the next 25 years.
3. *We need to fundamentally transform the economy and adopt a global goal to phase out greenhouse gases completely by mid-century.* Deep decarbonisation, starting immediately and leading to a zero-carbon society by 2050 or shortly thereafter, is key to future prosperity. This long-term goal, paired with strong national commitments, including a price on carbon, and a possibility to ramp up ambition via regular reviews, are essential elements of the Paris agreement. Fossil fuel subsidies should be removed urgently, and investment should be redirected to spark a global renewable energy revolution, warranting energy access for all and particularly for those most in need.
4. *Equity is critical for a successful global agreement in Paris. Every country must formulate an emissions pathway consistent with deep decarbonisation.* For the sake of fairness, rich countries and progressive industries can and should take the lead and decarbonise well before mid-century. Developing countries should formulate plans far beyond what they can be expected to pursue on their own, reaping benefits from leapfrogging into a sustainable economy, well supported by international climate finance and technology access. Safeguarding the right to development of the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) is fundamental.

high per capita greenhouse emissions in South Africa (which is roughly on par with that of the European Union), the neo-liberal emphasis on economic growth (and implied increases in energy consumption) is not innocent. Yet, the need for sustained economic growth to address poverty and unemployment and to allow for social development is hardly questioned. The possibility of a “good life beyond growth” is apparently not contemplated while the validity of the concept ‘development’ is taken for granted.<sup>9</sup>

### **On what inhibits Economic Growth (with a Focus on present Inequalities)**

“Growth in South Africa over the past decade was largely fuelled by consumer spending. Consumption-led growth benefits short-term job creation, especially through services such as retail. However, a small economy cannot sustain consumption-led growth for long. ... A key recommendation of the New Growth Path focuses on the shift from consumption-led to investment-led growth” (p. 12).

What, according to the *Diagnostic Overview*, is the underlying problem that inhibits economic growth – and therefore curtails social development, employment and education? While any one answer to this question will be simplistic,<sup>10</sup> there is also little doubt that the need

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<sup>9</sup> Elsewhere I have challenged the validity of this assumption. See Ernst M Conradie, “Why can’t the Term Development just be dropped altogether? Some Reflections on the Concept of Maturation as Alternative to Development Discourse”, *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 72:4, 2016:1-11.

<sup>10</sup> In a document titled *Climate Change – A Challenge to the Churches in South Africa* produced by the South African Council of Churches (Marshalltown: SACC, 2009) the following ten factors that contribute to the production of wealth are identified:

- Access to energy sources (consider the availability and use of fossil fuels);
- natural resources, including various non-renewable resources and renewable resources such as water, soil, trees and plants and fish stocks (access to cheap sources was a driving force behind colonialism, remains crucial for many industries, leads to a current scramble for raw materials available in various African countries and are often monopolised by powerful economic institutions);
- land/property (consider the conquest of land through war and imperialism, ensuring political control over such resources);
- labour and employment (consider the role of slavery, the exploitation of cheap labour, the tendency towards outsourcing labour costs, the impact of trade unions and the cutting of labour costs by replacing it with technology);
- knowledge and skills (consider the role of research, ingenuity, education and training and unequal access to quality education);
- the means of production (including various forms of technology that are sometimes beneficial, sometimes destructive);
- the formation of strong institutions such as business corporations with efficient management systems which allow for the sharing of risks and give some groups a competitive advantage over others (consider the ways in which the globalised economy is dominated by powerful multi-national companies and the interests of their shareholders);
- cultural values and virtues (consider the emphasis on entrepreneurship, creativity, innovation, dedication, diligence, productivity, efficiency, innovative leadership) as well as economic drives (consider the quest for progress, success, fame, affluence);
- the availability of capital to finance large new projects based on previous profits (consider the role of credit, judgements on creditworthiness and interests paid on such credit) as well as the role played by investments, shareholding and the quest for profit, interests on investments and the lucrative transfer of money or financial products where no trade in goods is involved (i.e. making money from money alone, without adding anything to economic well-being);
- access to viable markets to sell products (influenced by legislation and trade agreements) and the stimulation of consumer demands through advertising (p. 26-27).

for foreign direct investment is seen as the key ingredient necessary to kickstart economic growth. What prevents the South African economy from attracting such foreign investment (or worse, for the creditworthiness of the South African economy to be downgraded to ‘junk status’)? Here a range of factors would need to be given. Clearly the problem does not lie with natural resources, even though the gold mining industry can no longer provide the backbone to the economy. The availability of cheap sources of energy is no longer the drawback that it used to be in the Mandela-government. Relatively high wages for relatively low productivity and protracted wage negotiations and strikes are prohibitive factors. The same applies to levels of crime and corruption (the misuse of an official position for personal gain – see p. 25). Political stability within a constitutional framework should provide a platform for business confidence but this is being eroded by the multiple scandals plaguing the former Zuma government. One may argue that the National Development Plan itself is aimed at providing a framework to restore such confidence.

In addition to the role of foreign investment and revenue from the export of resources,<sup>11</sup> one may say that the *Diagnostic Overview* identifies four other crucial internal factors that have to be addressed to ensure economic growth, namely levels of (in)efficiency in grasping business opportunities,<sup>12</sup> inadequate infrastructure (including transport logistics, information technology, energy efficiency, water management and sanitation), the development of skills amongst the poorest half of citizens through adequate education and training, and the need for social cohesion amongst citizens to ensure economic cooperation at all levels. Indeed, “Social division impedes the formation of consensus to develop, change or even implement policy” (p. 26). This assessment may be accurate but given economic inequalities and unevenness in the quality of education, it requires a more detailed class analysis to understand at what level the problem lies.

There is no doubt that ordinary South Africans recognise the crucial role played by education in order to get somewhere in life. The concerns about the uneven quality of primary and secondary education are therefore pertinent. One may say that roughly 25% of schools in South Africa provide good to excellent education, 50% are mediocre at best while around 25% are (completely) dysfunctional.<sup>13</sup> The *Diagnostic Overview* identifies various factors such as low literacy levels among parents, poor nutrition, violence and

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The document emphasises that the production of wealth always depends on an interplay between all these factors. Each of these factors is deeply influenced by historic injustices and the legacy of imperialism, colonialism, classism, racism, sexism and cultural elitism. In a telling comment the document adds that “Some may wish to emphasise the role of cultural values, virtues and the proper management of corporate institutions. Thereby they tacitly imply that those who are poor are relatively lazy, stupid, slow, corrupt or unlucky. By contrast, those of us who emphasise injustices typically focus on all the other factors, including access to the means of production, labour costs and unfair trade relations” (p. 27-28). Debates on the interplay between these factors remain unresolved.

<sup>11</sup> The *Diagnostic Overview* states that such gains “will only be durable and sustainable if South Africa can use these revenues to improve education, invest in infrastructure and support labour-absorbing industries” (p. 12).

<sup>12</sup> The *Diagnostic Overview* states that “While increasing per capita income is important, there is substantial room to improve South Africa’s level of human development within present income levels” (p. 9). One reason for that is the limited expansion of small and medium-scale enterprises (see p. 12).

<sup>13</sup> This is admittedly a rough generalisation. It is based on impressions derived from a Church Consultative Workshop on Education in collaboration with the Carnegie 3 process in search of effective strategies to overcome poverty and inequality in South Africa that I attended in November 2013. There is a wealth of information available on the education crisis in South Africa that cannot be reviewed here. See also Spaul’s observation that primary education in South Africa is a bifurcated system with significant difference in converting educational inputs into outputs such as numeracy and literacy skills. See Nicholas Spaul, “Poverty & privilege: Primary school inequality in South Africa”, *International Journal of Educational Development*, 33:5, September 2013:436-447.

social fragmentation contributing to poor performance of South African children in literacy and numeracy tests (compared to other African countries) but blames it on teacher performance and the quality of school leadership (p. 15). Access to better schools is determined by one's proximity to such a school. Since the physical location of a school coincides with class distinctions (especially in urban areas) and by the lasting impact of group areas on the basis of race classification,<sup>14</sup> it is not easy for a child from a poor family to gain access to better schools. One can only attend a better school further away from home on the basis of parental income or through scholarships available to a select few. As a result, access to quality education is largely influenced by economic class. Nevertheless, the quality of education is clearly not only a function of finance but of the slow process of building viable institutions.

One may argue that the structural violence embedded in the South African economy has shifted from the division between land owners and landless serfs (with others crammed into 'reserves') through the colonial conquest of land through military power since the 17<sup>th</sup> century, to the division between industrial capitalists (owning the means of production for agriculture, mining and industry) and workers since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, to the racialised oppression of political resistance by the apartheid regime, to the current inequalities of a service-based economy that retain features of each of the former dispensations and will be radicalised by the advent of the fourth industrial revolution. The deepest current divide is arguably between the more or less educated, employed elite (and those who buy into their power basis) and the uneducated, mostly unemployed or semi-employed underclasses. This divide is best understood by tertiary students who have the potential to move from the underclasses to the employed, educated elite. However, since not all registered students will eventually obtain tertiary qualifications, some will fail to make such a transition. They become highly frustrated, venting their anger against any obstacle that may hinder their progress. The student protests of 2015 and 2016 clearly need to be understood against this background.

There is indeed a rough correlation between class (standard of living ranging from poor to wealthy, but also social status) and levels of education (with primary, Grade 9, Grade 12, tertiary or postgraduate qualifications) but a more detailed analysis would obviously be required. I suggest that the following 12 categories be recognised (not necessarily in terms of levels of income):

- 1) the royal elite (traditional leaders) with control over land and property and some privileges;
- 2) the landed aristocracy (with 'old money' from mining, retail or agribusiness, now invested in land, shares, property or art);
- 3) the nouveau riche who are making fortunes in various ways in business and industry;
- 4) business entrepreneurs (with different levels of education and different standards of living from lower middle class upwards);
- 5) professionals of various kinds (usually with tertiary qualifications, ranging from wealthy CEOs of companies to middle class teachers and nurses);
- 6) skilled artisans (usually with matric and/or technical qualifications, including computer

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<sup>14</sup> As the *Diagnostic Overview* observes, "The spatial legacy of apartheid continues to weigh on the entire country" (p. 19). Spaul comments: "Black students usually live far from good schools (situated in expensive neighborhoods), which make such schools geographically inaccessible, and those same schools usually charge higher school fees, which makes them financially inaccessible." See Spaul, "Poverty & Privilege", p. 438.

- programmers, mechanics and technicians of various kinds);
- 7) semi-skilled workers (usually with matric and with some language competence, often unionised) employed in various sectors, sometimes as overseers but with limited job security);
  - 8) lowly-skilled workers (usually without matric but fully employed and often unionised, e.g. as mine workers, farm workers, care givers, domestic workers, petrol attendants, cleaners, etc.);
  - 9) semi-employed, lowly skilled workers (usually without matric, often working as day labourers or on odd jobs, without job security or union support);
  - 10) the unemployed with or without matric, looking for some form of employment for shorter or longer periods of time;
  - 11) the unemployable who have not been doing any work for an extended period of time and will struggle to find and maintain employment (including gangsters, criminals, alcoholics, beggars, vagrants);
  - 12) those between the ages of 18 and 65 who are dependent on care and who cannot do full-time work due to various disabilities.

This analysis suggests the need for an appreciation of technical skills, alongside the cultural prestige associated with academic qualifications as a crucial factor in addressing class differences. Sadly, there has been a deterioration of the guilds that govern standards in various fields of technical expertise. However, the level of skills is not the only indicator of employability.

### **On Employability**

“Skills acquisition is out of line with the needs of a modernising economy. Higher education institutions are not producing the number of skilled personnel that the economy requires – which raises the cost of people who do have skills. The economy generates large numbers of low- and semi-skilled jobs, but these do require a basic set of capabilities such as reading comprehension” (p. 13).

The notion of employability may help to understand one of the deepest divisions in the South African society since it combines aspects of social cohesion, education and levels of skills. Note that some may be currently employed but are actually unemployable at that level, while others may be currently unemployed but quite employable in terms of levels of skill and market mechanisms. I will focus here on the category of unemployability although the focus is usually either on the failure of the market, or on structural changes in the economy (from agriculture to mining, industry and services) or on population growth.

This emphasis on employability can easily be misunderstood. Unemployability may suggest a sense of failure, even moral failure for which those who are indeed unemployed are to be blamed. It can easily be reduced to an elitist (and in some cases racist) denigration of the worth of the poor for the South African economy (“the unemployed are stupid, lazy, slow or all three”). Accordingly, this emphasis can yield to capitalist values around acquiring skills without taking into account the impact of the use of technology to reduce labour costs deliberately. In this way the structural causes of unemployment in the context of globalisation would be underplayed. This is clearly recognised in the *Diagnostic Overview*:



The roots of South Africa's high rates of unemployment, poverty and inequality can be traced to more than a century of colonial exploitation and apartheid – denying African people access to land, and the right to run businesses, to own certain assets, to quality education and to live in well-located areas. Decades of racial discrimination in the workplace led to social stratification based on skin colour, with social and economic institutions largely reinforcing these inequities (p. 9).

In addition, the impact of the injustices of the apartheid period on unemployability would need to be recognised. At an experiential level this is one of the harder indicators of current divisions in the South African society. Those who cannot find or keep employment are marginalised in the national economy and they know that they are likely to remain dependent upon social grants for the rest of their lives. They thus become despondent.

I suggest that one may identify four structural indicators of unemployability. In each case these are related to the legacy of imperialism, colonialism and apartheid. In each case these structural causes have an impact on various ages of personal development, so that these causes of unemployment are very difficult to address later in life.

- a) A first indicator of employability is related to access to adequate basic education.<sup>15</sup> It is widely recognised that basic education entails the acquiring of reading, writing and numeracy skills. In addition, basic education allows a child to develop a frame of reference which enables the integration of further knowledge. The *Diagnostic Overview* admits under one of its main headings that: “The quality of education for poor black South Africans is substandard”. This means that despite the education provided learners do not acquire the necessary literacy and numeracy skills.<sup>16</sup> It adds the following:

The economy has failed to create jobs at the pace necessary to reduce extremely high unemployment, and the education system has failed to ensure that equalised public spending on schooling translates into improved education for poor black children. Raising educational outcomes and increasing employment levels would mean more opportunities for young people, higher productivity growth, rising incomes, increased tax revenue, less dependence on grants, reduced scope for the politics of patronage, greater social cohesion, higher levels of investment and more space for creativity (p. 5).

What is seldom admitted by planners is how difficult it is to overcome inferior language and numeracy skills after the age of let us say 11 or 12.<sup>17</sup> This is not to say that it is impossible, only that brain development makes it increasingly difficult to acquire such skills on the basis of a weak foundation later in life.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> For a discussion on basic education, see Michael Arnst, Lisa Draga and Lisa Andrews, “Basic Education and the National Development Plan”. *Social Dynamics*, 39:1, 2013:130-137.

<sup>16</sup> The *Diagnostic Overview* comments: “Literacy and numeracy test scores are low by African and global standards, despite the fact that government spends about 6 percent of GDP on education and South Africa's teachers are among the highest paid in the world (in purchasing power parity terms)” (p. 14). Moreover, “While there have been some improvements as measured by the pass rate of those who sat the 2010 matriculation exam which was 67.8 percent, this hides the fact that only 15 percent achieved an average mark of 40 percent or more. This means that roughly 7 percent of the cohort of children born between 1990 and 1994 achieved this standard” (p. 14).

<sup>17</sup> The impact of pre-school formation is recognised in the *Diagnostic Overview*. It notes that “Educationists often argue that most of a child's deductive ability is formed before they enter school. ... The factors that influence school scores at age seven are not entirely understood, but associated factors include the presence of both parents in the household, whether parents can read and write, the prevalence of books in the house, adequate nutrition and micronutrient intake, and generally stimulating environments for children” (p. 14).

<sup>18</sup> Nicholas Spaul comments: “All of the available evidence suggests that many South African children are acquiring debilitating learning deficits early on in their schooling careers and that this is the root cause of

Here the language of instruction used in South African schools poses a crucial problem. Children in good schools who receive instruction in their mother tongue learn to master their own language by the age of 11 or so when they start using passive constructions required for formulation. If they have not mastered the language of instruction by that time, or even writing skills in their own mother tongue, this is often condoned by teachers as ‘perfectly understandable’ given the circumstances. By contrast, those who have mastered one language find it quite possible to transfer such skills to another language later in life. In my experience such forms of condoning inadequacies continue in secondary and tertiary education even up to Honours level. At Masters level that can no longer be condoned since the results are accessible in the public domain. Students are then required to improve earlier drafts of a thesis, often for the first time in their academic careers. Where this is still condoned, standards are inevitably lowered.

Of course language proficiency is a matter of degree, but some form of proficiency is required for almost any form of employment. Without basic language and numeracy skills the ceiling for employability becomes much lower.

- b) A second indicator of employability is fairly widely recognised, namely the acquiring of generic practical skills – that would later be required to work with machines, wood, raw materials, computers etc. These skills include the visual recognition of forms, spatial orientation, fine motor skills, an ability to concentrate, to organise one’s work space and so forth. The development of such generic skills probably has to be in place at least by the age of 15 in order to lay the foundation for more specific skills that will be required in specific job environments – used by artisans, technicians and their assistants alike. The absence of such skills would undoubtedly be associated with unemployability in almost all sectors of the formal economy except for some menial forms of manual labour.

This indicator of employability is plagued by the legacy of the past in a very particular way, namely the value that is placed on high level technical skills amongst artisans. My impression (which is alas rather vague) is that this is undermined by a flawed comparison with the status attributed to academic qualifications. Perhaps the very name of the former Department of Education and Training contributed to this lack of appreciation that filtered through to the rest of the economic system. One measurable indicator in this regard may be the value attributed to training in agriculture amongst teenage African learners. How many are taking this as a subject in school? Undoubtedly, the connotations and status attached to manual agricultural work on feudal commercial farms and gendered role responsibilities shape such attitudes.

- c) A third indicator of employability is related to the development of basic personal and inter-personal skills, attitudes and virtues. These include a range of listening skills, hygiene, understanding the need for safety, showing respect for the rights, needs and emotions of others, managing conflict, exercising self-control in terms of temper, eating, drinking, sexual desires, possessions, etc. This is followed by skills needed for

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underperformance in later years. Because they do not master the elementary numeracy and literacy skills in the foundation and intermediate phases, they are precluded from further learning and engaging fully with the grade-appropriate curriculum.” See his report, *South Africa’s Education Crisis: The Quality of Education in South Africa 1994-2011*, commissioned by the Centre for Development and Enterprise (October 2013), p. 39. See <http://www.section27.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Spaull-2013-CDE-report-South-African-Education-Crisis.pdf> (accessed 27 April 2015).

cooperation, self-restraint, courage, a sense of justice and a bit of wisdom (the so-called four cardinal virtues).

The foundations for such skills, attitudes and virtues have to be laid very early in life, probably well before the age of seven. This is best done in a stable family environment, supplemented by the extended family, role models in the local community and religious leaders. Here the legacy of the past should again be obvious. All too many families have become highly dysfunctional as a result of the strain of divorce, Aids orphans, forced removals, migrant labour, urbanisation and the many traps associated with a culture of poverty (alcohol and drug abuse, gangsterism, gambling, prostitution). Parents in stable families find it hard enough to transfer such skills to their children; in dysfunctional families it may seem almost miraculous if young adults emerge with adequate skills. Here the NPC's Diagnostic Report recognises the underlying problem:

At a micro level, the family is the principal agent for socialisation, value inculcation and creating a sense of belonging. The family represents the centre of children's lives. According to the Macro Social report produced by the Presidency in 2006, the two-parent household is on the decline, with an increase in the proportion of both single and extended households in urban and rural areas; marriage rates are falling (p. 27).

The role of such basic personal and inter-personal skills, attitudes and virtues with respect to employability cannot be overestimated. One may be currently employed, but one would be likely to lose one's job if problems surface around drinking, fighting, stealing or sexual harassment. Of course, one may argue that there is some good in every human being and such skills and virtues are never completely absent or completely perfected. However, it should be equally clear that the ceiling for employability would be lowered to the extent that such problems increase, even if the basic education and generic practical skills of a person are deemed satisfactory.

- d) A fourth indicator is related to task-oriented attitudes, values and virtues. This has to do with learning to do something well and not only whether one can do it. In general it has to do with a willingness to accept responsibility coupled with an appreciation of excellence, with not being satisfied with less than that. One needs to learn how to do some things well, whether it is cleaning the dishes, tidying one's bed, doing homework, doing an errand, playing sport or tackling an assignment. Here a whole range of descriptors may be used for excellence, some exploited to the extreme in the world of business and industry. Consider the following: artistry, coherence concentration, creativity, curiosity, dedication, dexterity, diligence, discipline, efficacy, efficiency, entrepreneurship, innovation, punctuality, teachability and tidiness. More descriptors can surely be added. Of course, this is a matter of degree and function. One may be quite happy with an untidy room, but may still exercise discipline with one's homework at school. Nevertheless, without the urge for excellence and a willingness to accept responsibility at least in some areas, it is unlikely that one would find stable employment.

These attitudes are gradually acquired from around the age of five when one is first given little tasks from one's parents. They are developed over a long period of time, but surely a foundation needs to be laid well before the end of primary school in order to allow for further development that may continue up to the age of retirement. One would hope to get better at what one is doing with experience, but this will only come with an appropriate attitude.

The development of such attitudes is not only related to the functionality of nuclear families. It is crucial to see several role models in action in order see how things are

done and to learn to mimic that over an extended period of time. This typically takes places in the process of acquiring a range of skills. Role models in the extended family, the neighbourhood, schools and community organisations are crucial in this regard. Religious affiliation may well offer support and motivation for such attitudes. Many pastors seek in their ministry to undergird and legitimise the upward social mobility of the lower-middle class.

The destructive legacy of the apartheid past has to be recognised here as well. Forced removals uprooted people and destroyed bonds of community so that it required a whole generation to rebuild community structures. Perhaps the most significant problem is the paucity of strong community organisations. To keep such an organisation going over an extended period of time requires considerable skills, dedication and the right attitudes. It requires leadership, participatory decision making, good secretaries to keep records and to ensure implementation, disciplined treasurers and some form of effectiveness in terms of reaching the aims and objectives of the organisation. All too often organisations, schools, businesses or sports clubs are plagued by the lack of persons who have mastered the appropriate task-oriented attitudes, values and virtues.

In considering these four indicators of employability together, it is striking to what extent the foundations have to be laid at an early age. One may say that the earlier the age when the foundations have to be laid, the more crucial that indicator may be for employability. Thus there is an order from the development of personal and interpersonal skills and virtues (at least from the age of 2), the development of task-related attitudes (at least from the age of 6), the knowledge and skills associated with basic education (between the age of 6 and 11) and the development of generic practical skills (from the age of 5 to 15).

This analysis also indicates that simple solutions will not do. To address the four indicators of employability is necessarily slow work. It will require at least one or two generations to overcome the impact of colonialism and apartheid – if further injustices and social conflict do not aggravate the current situation.

## **On Inequalities and the Legacy of the Past**

“For those South Africans who are excluded from the formal economy, live in informal settlements, depend on social services which are either absent or of very poor quality; the political transition is yet to translate into a better life. ... The continued social and economic exclusion of millions of South Africans, reflected in high levels of poverty and inequality, is our biggest challenge. In our view, these high levels of poverty and inequality have a historical basis in apartheid and are driven principally by the fact that too few people work and that the quality of education for many black people remains poor” (p. 7)

“South Africa is a highly unequal country. This was true for much of the past century and remains so today. According to the Income and Expenditure Survey, the Gini coefficient was 0.67 in 2005, which is very high by international standards. The incomes of both the richest and the poorest 20 percent of the population both rose by about 45 percent between 1995 and 2005. The distribution of income to the richest and poorest sections of society did not change significantly between 1995 and 2005. The poorest 20 percent of the population earns about 2.3 percent of national income, while the richest 20 percent earns about 70 percent of the income” (p. 9).

“The dividing lines in our society are complex and evolving. While race is still the key dividing line, issues such as gender and locality are also important factors that explain

differences in opportunity. Inequality compounds this division. While we have made significant progress in deracialising the upper end of the income spectrum, poor quality education and high youth unemployment inhibits a broadening of opportunity necessary to reduce inequality and heal the divisions of the past” (p. 26).

The *Diagnostic Overview* clearly recognises the triple problem of poverty, unemployment and inequality (PIU) as lying at the core of current problems. These problems have to be dealt with together as they reinforce each other.<sup>19</sup> To alleviate poverty through social grants without addressing unemployment and employability will not do since that would still undermine a sense of self-worth and human dignity. Likewise, although poverty may be alleviated through social grants,<sup>20</sup> this does not necessarily overcome growing inequality if the rich are getting richer while the poor are falling further behind and the unemployed become unemployable in a service-based economy. Each of these problems is intransigent: the poor will always be with us, full employment in industrialised societies will remain elusive, while a degree of inequality is unavoidable and indeed necessary to incentivise initiative. The problem is not inequality itself (or differences in income) but the degree of inequality (or the income differential).

Inequality is indeed the most difficult of the three concepts to understand and address. However, there can be no doubt that the current gross inequalities are shaped by the legacy of imperialism, colonialism and by apartheid as one particularly crude phase within that history. This is a history characterised by land conquest, the quest for cheap labour, political oppression, white supremacy, discrimination and domination, often legitimised in the name of Christianity. It is also a history characterised by a spiral of violence, i.e. a dialectic between structural violence, revolutionary resistance and repressive violence. This is aggravated by gross violations of human rights and retaliation, disproportionate retribution, resentment and revenge.

As the *Diagnostic Overview* puts it, “historical disadvantages continue to have an adverse effect on tens of millions of citizens. This is particularly true in education and employment, which the commission has identified as the most pressing challenges facing the country” (p. 5). It is widely recognised that it will not be easy to undo the legacy of the past. It may take generations. If I am not mistaken the *Diagnostic Overview* recognises basically five ways to address such inequalities, namely

- 1) restitution (giving back what can be given back);
- 2) compensation for what cannot be given back;
- 3) creating opportunities to reverse the legacy of the past through land redistribution, affirmative action to ensure that the public service becomes more representative of South Africa’s population (see p. 22), employment equity and black economic empowerment;

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<sup>19</sup> This is obvious but well recognised in the *Diagnostic Overview*: “High rates of unemployment anchor wide-spread poverty. Poor households tend to have high dependency ratios, with few earners supporting multiple dependents. Only 41 percent of the working age population is working, well below the average of similar countries” (p. 11).

<sup>20</sup> The problem is clearly recognised in the *Diagnostic Overview*: “Per capita income growth is only one indicator of a country’s wellbeing. It tells us how much income there is to share, but does not communicate the distribution of that income ... the proportion of people living below the poverty line was about 53 percent in 1995 and fell to 48 percent in 2008. This is a very high level of poverty for a middle-income economy. The diffusion of social grants was the most important contributor to falling income poverty from 2000” (p. 9). In other words, even though levels of poverty were reduced slightly, such income is not based on wages but shifted dramatically to dependence upon social grants.

- 4) economic growth to facilitate development in order to help those who have fallen behind to catch up; and
- 5) the introduction of safety nets where the other four strategies still fail – which is clearly the case with the rather elaborate social grant system.

It is quite obvious that the fifth aspect of this approach can only provide temporary alleviation of poverty; without higher levels of employment and adequate education such safety nets cannot provide a lasting solution even though it may be true that “Since 1994, government programmes have improved quality of life and living standards for the poorest South Africans” (p. 9), especially through expanded access to housing, water, sanitation, schooling, primary health care and electricity. The social grant system (but without a basic income grant) and ‘social wages’ (a package of measures ranging from free schooling to free water and electricity – see p. 9), together with the massive housing schemes, are all necessary due to high levels of poverty and unemployment, but seem to indicate that the other four aspects have failed to overcome inequality. As a result this has created a culture of dependency if not entitlement and the expectation that government must provide for the needs of the poor since they remain helpless to find jobs.

Moreover, the fourth path of fostering economic growth would not necessarily overcome inequality. Instead of the expected trickle-down effect, it may, in fact, lead to a trickle-up effect.<sup>21</sup> Those who do find employment may be better off than they were in terms of standard of living but may still fall further behind in terms of income, skills and education.

The third aspect of (creating opportunities to address past inequalities) is widely recognised as necessary but may have side-effects in terms of maintaining appropriate standards for service delivery. Part of the problem seems to be that the system and categories of race classification need to be maintained in order to circumscribe “previously disadvantaged groups”. This may be unavoidable but would work best if coupled to a particular time-frame.<sup>22</sup> The *Diagnostic Overview* does not use the term ‘redistribution’ (at all!) although the need for land redistribution is recognised elsewhere in government policies. There is also no reference to the redistribution of wealth through the nationalisation of mines or other assets. It seems that such redistribution has to take place through the systems of progressive taxation and social grants. What, then, are the possibilities for restitution (giving back what can be given back) and compensation?

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<sup>21</sup> For a critique, see Joerg Rieger, *No Rising Tide: Theology, Economics, and the Future*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009.

<sup>22</sup> The continuation of the system of race classification is both necessary, given the need for transformation and employment equity, and indefensible, given that this was indeed the cornerstone of apartheid policies. The continuation of the system and the categories used rely on the willingness of people to classify themselves or the cooption of administrators who are asked to classify people accordingly. There is no need here to explain the crudeness of the categories and the problems that this poses. One observation may suffice: One category is based on a colour (white), another on a country (India), another of an adjective (coloured) and the final one on a continent (Africa).

In policy debates at UWC I have suggested that a person should be asked three questions in order to capture the impact of the legacy of the past: a) How were you classified in South Africa before 1994? b) How was your father (or legal guardian) classified before 1994? c) How was your mother (or legal guardian) classified before 1994? The apartheid categories may then be used with the addition of “not applicable” – for people who were not classified before 1994 because they were not born yet or because they were not South African citizens before 1994. Such a system would mean that race classification will be phased out in two steps, namely for those born after 1994 and for those whose parents were born after 1994. This will take until around 2100: if a person retires in 2100 at the age of 65 (born in 2035), such a person may still have one or two parents born before 1994. This suggests a lengthy but not indefinite need for affirmative action – which is appropriate given the legacy of colonialism and apartheid.

The underlying problem that has to be addressed here is that restitution to address past injustices is not always possible. There will always be a deficit between what can be given back and what cannot be given back, while inequalities prevail. It is crucial to understand why this is the case. Consider the following examples which remain relatively simple because they focus on individual relationships:

- If I have stolen your bicycle I can return it, repair it (if I damaged it) or replace it with a similar one, but that would not undo your resentment over the theft and would not by itself heal the breach in our relationship (as friends, neighbours or citizens).
- If I have insulted you (e.g. through a racist or sexist comment), I can offer an apology to make amends and to limit the damage to our relationship, but nothing can undo the fact that the comment was made. There is nothing to be given back or even to compensate for but the breach in the relationship still has to be addressed.
- If I 'borrowed' your text book I can return that unscathed after the test but I cannot undo your inability to study for the test. Even if another opportunity for you to write the test can be arranged, nothing can undo the time that you lost as a result of failing the first test.
- If I have injured your child through negligent or drunken driving, I can pay for the hospital costs and pay compensation for pain endured, but I cannot undo the time that the child had to spend in hospital.
- If your child is not only injured but paralysed for the rest of her life, the deficit between what can be given back or compensated for and what can never be given back increases significantly.
- In the cases of rape and murder there is relatively little that can indeed be given back, while the deficit increases exponentially given the intentional nature of such violations of human rights. The only way to address such inequality seems to be to induce commensurate suffering and shame on the perpetrator.

In any such breach of a relationship it may be helpful to distinguish between four aspects, namely what can indeed be given back to the other party in more or less the same form (e.g. stolen goods), what cannot be given back in the same form but for which compensation can be offered (for example through financial compensation, offering alternatives and creating new opportunities to compensate for a loss), what can be addressed through a redress of wrongs (e.g. in the form of a private or public apology following insults, racist remarks, forms of sexual harassment) and what can never be given back (e.g. violations of dignity or life through rape, maiming or murder). The deficit between what can be given back or compensated for, and what cannot be given back is constituted differently, depending on which examples are used. I will return to this fourfold distinction below.

The examples above remain relative simple since they all have to do with interpersonal relations where there is little duration between the occurrence of an injustice and attempts to address that. This may be contrasted with a range of further examples going further and further back in history:

- If a husband has been guilty of physical and emotional domestic violence over a period of ten years, the physical wounds may heal if he would stop doing that, but the psychological damage to his wife and children is a quite different matter.
- If a company has exercised a virtual monopoly over a decade or more, keeping prices artificially high (e.g. for computer software), many would be disadvantaged but it would be difficult to compensate for that at a later stage.

- If someone lost a house due to the implementation of the Group Areas Act in the 1960s, the house may be returned (perhaps in the same form), but nothing can undo the forty years in between, the disruption of family life and the psychological impact of that, and the realisation that the best years of the lives of the original owners have come and gone. If the house was destroyed for the sake of urban or industrial development, then financial compensation may be offered or alternative housing may be made available, but sentiment over the specific location of the former house and its neighbourhood cannot be ameliorated in such ways.
- If one's deceased parents were paid unfair wages as serfs on a commercial farm throughout their adult lives, then the cumulative impact of being disadvantaged in this way (e.g. loss of income, prospects for better education or the psychological impact of being subservient) can scarcely be calculated, and cannot be overcome merely through financial compensation.<sup>23</sup>
- If one's grandparents did not enjoy opportunities for education available to others merely on the basis of race classification (irrespective of intellectual ability), this will have considerable long-term economic consequences for all their descendants. However, one's position will be influenced not only by one set of grandparents but also by the other set of grandparents, by one's own parents or legal guardians and by one's own life experiences and choices.
- Those who benefited from previous policies in terms of subsidies, education, employment or business opportunities and their descendants hold a considerable advantage over others who were not favoured by such policies, even if no subsequent injustices took place (which is seldom the case).
- If one's ancestors were sold by nearby tribes as slaves to merchants, the economic impact of that (both ways) may still be felt many generations later. The benefits of owning slaves and the psychological and financial damage done by having been enslaved may stretch over several generations.
- If one's ancestral land was taken away due to colonial conquest two hundred years ago, this may have a lasting impact on one's present economic situation, although any direct link would be impossible to establish – not only because of diverse patterns of land ownership but also given that there may by now be thousands of descendants of the original owners.

Given such examples one may identify three reasons why restitution may not be possible, although in a technical sense nothing can ever be given back, in the same way that one cannot walk through the same river twice. Firstly the nature of the injustice may be irreversible (e.g. rape). Secondly, the mere fact that it happened and that it caused resentment cannot be undone. Thirdly, the delay between the time that the injustice occurred and the attempts at restoration complicates matters in several ways.<sup>24</sup>

This may be illustrated with the example of the expropriation of farm land a generation

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<sup>23</sup> This problem is recognised in the *Diagnostic Overview*: “Decades of racial discrimination, especially in the workplace, confined the majority of black people to menial labour. Low wages and low productivity, combined with poor-quality schooling that limited social mobility, led to low levels of income. Stringent policies limiting ownership of land and influx control measures that limited access to the cities prevented an entrepreneurial class from developing” (p. 10).

<sup>24</sup> I have discussed the amplification and diffusion of injustice as a result of time delays in more detail in Ernst M Conradie, *Om Reg te Stel: Oor Regverdiging én Geregtigheid*. Wellington: Bybelmedia, 2018.



or two ago. To receive land back after fifty years may be symbolically important but does not compensate for the loss of income in the interim. Restoration of ownership may be impossible if infrastructure has been destroyed or replaced by new developments (e.g. farmland used for urban housing developments). Moreover, it may be extremely difficult to catch up with economic developments, technological changes and the expertise required that occurred in the interim. This is aggravated by structural changes from an economy based on agriculture to one on mining, industry, services and finances. With each shift there has also been a transfer in the location of valuable assets, e.g. from farm land to urban land, to infrastructure, technology, financial assets and shareholding.

All of these changes may occur within the lifetime of one individual. It becomes far more difficult to deal with inequalities if these are extended over three or more generations. This is not merely a case of demographic and cultural changes experienced by children and grandchildren. The impact of particular past injustices become dispersed over time since these are either aggravated and amplified through the continued impact of unjust policies, practices and structures (structural violence), or partially alleviated by subsequent developments, or caught up in the spiral of structural violence, violent resistance and repression, or an interplay of violence and retaliation, or at the very least become entangled in a more complex web of factors leading to current inequalities. Inversely, current relationships characterised by inequality can over time no longer be traced back to discrete events (or the implementation of a policy) since a myriad of other factors may contribute to such inequality.<sup>25</sup> The colonial conquest of land is undoubtedly still a factor in current economic inequalities but even if one can trace one's ancestry to a particular piece of land, then one's claim to that land would need to be shared with thousands of other descendants of the owners at that time. Likewise, the impact of Cape slavery two or three hundred years ago is undoubtedly still felt today, but it would be impossible for the descendants of a particular slave to claim compensation for unfair wages and a violation of dignity now, if only because it would not be clear from whom this should be claimed. In all cases developments subsequent to 1994 (with new forms of injustice added to those of the past) only increase the complexity and lead to a further dissipation of the consequences. One may conclude that the longer the period over which inequalities are sustained, the more difficult it becomes to address such inequalities through reparation or compensation. However, this takes nothing away from the reality of current inequalities and the cumulative legacy of the past. In fact, the sense of injustice is aggravated by time delays: the longer the delay in reparation, the worse the injustice.

As a result it becomes increasingly difficult to establish what can be given back and what can be compensated for. Within two or three generations it may still be possible to give back what was taken (e.g. land, houses, but not cars or computers) or to compensate the victims or their heirs for losses incurred (e.g. for a loss of income), but beyond that restitution or compensation is no longer feasible – even though the lasting impact of past injustices and the accumulation of wealth built on such injustices remain obvious. As a result particular incidents of injustice tend to dissipate except for storytelling in extended

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<sup>25</sup> Some degree of inequality is basically inevitable given degrees of talent, positions and responsibility. No one would propose that the rector of a university and a cleaner should earn the same salary. The debate about inequality is about what an appropriate maximum income differential should be. Even then, income inequality is also influenced by career choices, diligence and ambition, by family responsibilities (opting not to work full-time), by external circumstances (e.g. sickness), by lifestyle choices in terms of expenses (spending money instead of saving it) and by the accumulation of capital and assets through frugality and wise investments.

families so that a sense of injustice is generalised, expressed in different locations compared to where injustices occurred and lingers in the form of amorphous resentment, frustration and anger.

Given such complexities it is not surprising that South African policy discourse on restitution (giving back what can be given back) is restricted to land restitution within a particular period of time, namely the proclamation of the Native Land Act of 1913. In the majority of cases land claims have been settled through financial compensation. Land restitution is complemented by tenure reform and the land redistribution programme, coupled with a support programme for emerging farmers. This focus on land restitution is widely regarded as symbolically significant (e.g. in the form of restitution) but remains in principle rather limited in its scope in order to address current economic inequalities. Given population growth and shifts in the structure of the economy (and the implied transfer of assets), relatively few people would ever benefit from such policies. Moreover, the success and impact of land restitution and redistribution programmes is disputed for many reasons that need not be discussed here.<sup>26</sup> What, then, about the other ways in which the injustices of the past have a lasting impact?

Another area where there has been national discussion on compensation is the report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, recommending that (rather meagre) financial compensation be offered to the victims of gross violations of human rights. However, this leaves at least four aspects of the injustices of the past outside of the debate on reparation or compensation, namely 1) grievances as a result of relatively minor but more extensive violations of human rights (e.g. beatings or racist insults); 2) the abuse of cheap labour over a long period of time and the resultant loss of income and capabilities, 3) a loss of economic and educational opportunities as a result of discriminatory policies and practices, and 4) unfair advantages given to others through job reservation, nepotism,<sup>27</sup> educational opportunities, subsidies, financial incentives, and so forth. The last of these aspects refers to the so-called beneficiaries of apartheid<sup>28</sup> – an issue which was raised by Mahmood Mamdani,<sup>29</sup> amongst others, and also through Desmond Tutu's proposal for a wealth tax, but which is sidelined in public debates, presumably in order not to invoke white guilt.

In dealing with current inequalities that are shaped by the legacy of the distant past, it seems necessary to distinguish between at least four aspects of restorative justice:<sup>30</sup>

- First, the term 'restitution' (making amends, putting things right) may be used for giving back fixed assets that can indeed still be given back in more or less the same form. The term land restitution is typically used in this way.

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<sup>26</sup> For a recent discussion amidst a wealth of earlier literature, see Fred Hendricks, Lungisile Ntsebeza and Kirk Helliker (eds.), *The Promise of Land: Undoing a Century of Dispossession in South Africa*. Johannesburg: Jacana, 2013.

<sup>27</sup> The case of nepotism is distinct because a person who is appointed through nepotism obviously benefits from that while those not appointed are not necessarily disadvantaged directly. If there were 50 applicants for a post one may not have secured the job in any case. However, it is another matter if two persons are shortlisted on the basis of merit and one is then appointed on the basis of nepotism.

<sup>28</sup> A differentiated analysis requires finer distinctions between the perpetrators and victims of apartheid. One needs to allow for distinctions between the architects, implementers, enforcers and supporters of apartheid, the beneficiaries of apartheid, the bystanders and many onlookers and those few who were indeed deeply involved in the struggle against apartheid.

<sup>29</sup> See Mahmood Mamdani, "Reconciliation without justice", *Southern African Review of Books* No. 46 (1996).

<sup>30</sup> Note that what these terms mean in relation to each other may be tested with reference to each of the examples indicated above.

- Second, the term 'compensation' may be used to refer to an act of seeking to address damages in a breached relationship as a result of past injustices through financial compensation, offering alternatives (e.g. housing somewhere else) or creating new opportunities. Note that there will always be a deficit between the loss incurred and the compensation received.
- Third, I suggest that the term 'reparation' may be used to refer to creative acts, strategies or policies that are introduced (e.g. affirmative action, weighted opportunities, differentiated forms of taxation) in cases where a dissipation and amplification of injustices have taken place due to the extension of unequal relationships over time so that it is no longer feasible to trace back current relationships of inequality to any specific event, structure or policy. Such forms of reparation cannot merely be of a symbolic nature given the aim of justice but also cannot go beyond a 'rough' sense of justice.<sup>31</sup> It is best tied to a particular timeframe.
- Fourth, the term 'restoration' refers to acts aimed at reconciliation through reciprocal giving and receiving in order to demonstrate a desire for the healing (restoring) of a relationship. This is based on the recognition that the deficit between what can and what cannot be given back is constituted by the very occurrence of a breach and its extension over time. The aim here is not so much justice but reconciliation, i.e. the healing of the distorted relationship itself. The gifts should be proportionate to the nature of the breach. It should not be too small (that would underestimate the damage that was caused) and should not be too large either (that would constitute a bribe).<sup>32</sup> It should be clear that such gifts aimed at the restoration of relationships cannot be equated with restitution, compensation and reparation but assumes these. In fact, reconciliation is impossible without restitution (giving back what can be given back), compensation (to the extent that this is possible) and forgiveness. Forgiveness requires a declaration by the victims of the past that the deficit will no longer be held against the perpetrator – for the sake of a restored relationship.

Given the current racialised inequalities in terms of standard of living and levels of education, an inability to address the legacy of the past will have far-reaching future consequences. Put succinctly, for many the only viable option seems to be one based on sustained economic growth (coupled with affirmative action) that will allow those who were previously disadvantaged to catch up with others. The emergence of a new black elite through black economic empowerment seems to validate this route. However, the hope for 'catching up' through the 'trickle down' effect of economic growth is a pipe dream.<sup>33</sup> All indications are that the affluent elite (at least those in the top income decile) are extending their advantage, while the poorest 40% will remain reliant on social grants for the

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<sup>31</sup> There are many institutions dealing with such issues. Three such institutions based in the Western Cape (only) may be mentioned, namely the Institution for Justice and Reconciliation, the Institute for the Healing of Memories, the Restitution Foundation and the Five Plus Project. The goal of the Five Plus Project is to get as many comparatively well-off South Africans as possible to give at least 5% of their income to organisations and initiatives helping to reduce poverty in South Africa or alleviate its effects. The Project has over 250 members See <http://www.fiveplus.uct.ac.za/>.

<sup>32</sup> For a more detailed discussion, see Ernst M Conradie (ed.), *Reconciliation as a Guiding Vision for South Africa?* (Stellenbosch: SUN Press, 2013).

<sup>33</sup> May observes that the available evidence suggests that the argument for poverty reduction through the trickle down effect from broad-based growth does not hold in sub-Saharan Africa. Even where there is a reduction in absolute poverty, such growth may not lead to a reduction in inequality. Inversely, there is evidence that suggests that inequality hampers growth because inequalities in human assets are likely to constrain people from participating in economic activities. See May, *Poverty and Inequality in South Africa*, 13-14.

foreseeable future. The National Development Plan presents a more nuanced strategy to address such lasting inequalities. A discussion of the plan falls outside the scope of this contribution but it needs to be noted again that the NDP is premised on the need for economic growth. The hope for economic growth cannot be the only way to address economic inequalities.

In the interim the prevailing economic inequalities feed simmering social unrest in varied ways. The affluent sense the need to secure their positions, while inequality prompts the upward social mobility of the (lower) middle class and a sense of despondency amongst those left behind. Coupled with a culture of entitlement such tensions regularly erupt through student protests, service delivery protests and debilitating industrial strikes for higher wages, if not through the political symbolism adopted by the Economic Freedom Fighters led by Julius Malema. Put bluntly, given global limits to economic growth (amidst long-term concerns over climate change), current inequalities in South Africa cannot be addressed merely by expanding the economy and without coming to terms with the legacy of the past. Inversely, environmental issues such as climate change cannot be addressed without coming to terms with inequality.<sup>34</sup>

### **On the Need for a deeper Diagnostic**

“We need leaders and citizens to commit to a bold programme to build a better future, based on ethical values and mutual sacrifice. The leadership required will think and act long term, rising above short-term personal or political gain. They will think and act in the interests of the nation as a whole, and avoid promoting the interests of one group of South Africans at the cost of others” (p. 28).

There is little doubt that poverty, unemployment and inequality are manifestations at the surface level of deeper underlying structural problems in the South African society. The problem is not merely poverty, unemployment and inequality as such but the structural causes of such poverty, unemployment and inequality. This requires moral and spiritual discernment.

One may mention the structural injustices of the past associated with the legacy of imperialism, colonialism and apartheid – so that there are some beneficiaries who have become undeservedly affluent while others are undeservedly poor. One would also need to account for the alienation from the land, from the means of economic production and from communities due to imperial conquest, colonial occupation and the legacy of urbanisation. One would need to question the assumption that limitless economic growth is possible on a finite planet. One must consider the many forms of violence and the violation of human dignity. One would need to take into account the ideologies of nationalism, racism, classism, sexism and elitism. One would need to analyse the economic model of neo-liberal capitalism that is currently dominant, also in South Africa. One would need to address the issues of incompetence, mismanagement, corruption and state capture related to the Zuma government, while acknowledging the limitations within which any South African government necessarily has to operate. Each of these categories addresses forms of structural violence. They describe a situation in which people are trapped collectively, from which it is hard to escape, under which they all suffer but not equally so and to which they all contribute but again not equally so. The tendency here is to regard people as the innocent or not so innocent victims of circumstances beyond their control. For example, crime cannot be condoned although it is quite evident that “Crime finds fertile ground in countries with

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<sup>34</sup> I discussed this connection between addressing climate change and economic inequalities in Ernst M Conradie, *The Church and Climate Change*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2008.

huge inequality and where citizens feel they need not practise good citizenship” (p. 26). In the language of the Christian tradition this is to speak of the hold of sin as power. Sin has become inescapable so that people are born into a society characterised by violence and injustice to which they later also contribute.

However, a deeper diagnostic would need to acknowledge the ways in which people contribute individually and collectively to such structural violence. One would need to address issues related to the abuse of (political) power and corruption. One would need to acknowledge that the massive disease burden in South Africa is partly also our own doing (e.g. the spread of HIV, deaths due to injury and accidents, foetal alcohol syndrome and lifestyle diseases, even though the problem is exacerbated by the inefficiency of the public health care system.<sup>35</sup> One would need to acknowledge the failure of public servants to take responsibility and the erosion of accountability and line of authority in governance structures, together with the inability of public servants “to forge a collective professional identity and loyalty to the values of the Constitution rather than any political party” (or faction within a party) (p. 23). One would need to acknowledge a lack of diligence (sloth), i.e. to be “energetic in exercising our responsibilities” (see p. 28). One would have to confront the extravagant desire for affluence amongst the elite, the consumerist aspirations of the middle class and the yearning of many poor people to somehow imitate such examples.<sup>36</sup> One would need to unmask triumphalist theologies that legitimise the status quo, that seem to romanticise poverty and that suggest quick access to prosperity. In short, one would need to speak of the impact of sin, oppression, ideology, idolatry, and heresy.

Traditionally, the much maligned (if not ridiculed) Christian notion of sin has been understood in various ways that can be captured in secular terminology such as anthropocentrism (pride), consumerism and corruption (greed), domination in the name of difference (violence), a failure to reach one’s goals (sloth) and alienation (privation of the good).<sup>37</sup> In my view such categories may be of use to sharpen and deepen the diagnosis of what is wrong in the world.<sup>38</sup>

Such a diagnosis does not yet offer a prognosis or a remedy to redress the wrongs of the past and to build a better society. The National Planning Commission rightly followed up the *Diagnostic Report* with the *National Development Plan* (NDP). In this contribution I have offered concerns over the adequacy of the diagnosis that will be relevant for the adequacy of the ‘remedy’, albeit that the NDP is hardly being implemented in any case. The Christian gospel of course also offers a ‘remedy’, namely a message of liberation from the destructive power of sin, of the forgiveness of sin as guilt in order to address the injustices of the past, and of the healing of relationships. Whether this message is plausible is another matter, but it radicalises a vision for the future in the same way that it fathoms the ultimate roots of the underlying problem.

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<sup>35</sup> The section in the *Diagnostic Overview* that addresses the ailing public health system which confronts a massive disease burden (p. 20-22) makes for sobering reading.

<sup>36</sup> I have discussed this in more detail in Ernst M Conradie, *Christianity and a Critique of Consumerism: A Survey of Six Points of Entry*. Wellington: Bible Media, 2009.

<sup>37</sup> See Newton Cloete, “Hamartology and Ecology: A Critical Assessment of Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s View on the Nature of Sin.”, MTh thesis, University of the Western Cape (2014); also Ernst M Conradie “Penultimate Perspectives on the Root Causes of Environmental Destruction in Africa”. *Scriptura* 115, 2016:1-19. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.7833/115-0-1279>.

<sup>38</sup> For a more detailed argument that Christian discourse on sin may be regarded (at least from the outside) as a form of social diagnostics, despite some major obstacles that thwart a retrieval of sin discourse in the public sphere, see Ernst M Conradie, *Redeeming Sin? Social Diagnostics amid Ecological Destruction*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2017.

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